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✓ Latest release

Religious Affiliation Standard

Religious affiliation assesses the religious composition of the population and can be used with a range of variables to measure cultural diversity

Reference period 2016

Released 3/08/2016

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Australian Standard Classification of Religious Groups (ASCRG) and Religious Affiliation (RAS) - Major Review

In 2022, the ABS began a major review of the Australian Standard Classification of Religious Groups (ASCRG) and the associated Religious Affiliation standard (RAS; How we ask the religion question in the Census of Population and Housing). Changes to RAS were originally part of the ASCRG review, but will now be considered as part of the [2026 Census Topic Consultation](#) (<https://www.abs.gov.au/census/2026-census-topic-review>) process which is a separate process to the Religion Review.

For more information about the review of the ASCRG, please see the [2022-23 Review of the Australian Standard Classification of Religious Groups \(ASCRG\)](#) (<https://>

www.abs.gov.au/statistics/classifications/australian-standard-classification-religious-groups/2016..

A summary of the feedback received during the first round of public consultation, including the Religious Affiliation Standard (RAS), is provided in the following link: [2022 Review of the Australian Standard Classification of Religious Groups \(ASCRG\) and the Religious Affiliation Standard \(RAS\) - Australian Bureau of Statistics - Citizen Space \(abs.gov.au\) \(https://consult.abs.gov.au/standards-and-classifications/2022-australian-standard-classification-of-religio/\)](https://consult.abs.gov.au/standards-and-classifications/2022-australian-standard-classification-of-religio/).

If you would like more information, please email the ABS at standards@abs.gov.au (<mailto:standards@abs.gov.au>)

Introduction

Background

The Religious Affiliation Standard codifies the concepts, definitions, and methods recommended by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) for collecting, processing and presenting quality statistics about the religious beliefs and practices to which people adhere or the religious groups to which they belong.

Religious Affiliation is used to assess the religious composition of the Australian population and can be used with a range of other variables to assist in measuring cultural diversity. The variable provides a means for standardising the way data about religious and spiritual beliefs are collected and disseminated. The Religious Affiliation variable is used by various sectors of Australian society, including religious organisations (for planning their services to members), health and aged care facilities, educational organisations, government agencies and in social research.

Religious Affiliation is considered sensitive information and answering a question about it is optional in all ABS collections (see section 14(3) of the Census and Statistics Act 1905).

Name of standard

This is the Religious Affiliation standard.

Definitions

Nominal definition

Nominally, Religious Affiliation is defined as the religious or spiritual beliefs and practices to

which a person adheres or the religious group to which a person belongs.

Operational definition

Operationally, Religious Affiliation is defined as the religion to which a person nominates they have an affiliation. This may include other spiritual beliefs or no religious or spiritual beliefs.

Discussion of issues

Religious Affiliation is self assessed. It is not designed to measure the level of adherence to beliefs or participation in practices common to the nominated religious affiliation.

To improve data quality, it is important to advise respondents that if they do not identify with a religion or spiritual belief, they may answer the question by selecting the 'No religion' option.

Collection of variable data

Scope

Statistical units

Religious Affiliation is an attribute of the statistical unit 'person'. The variable Religious Affiliation applies to all persons.

Question modules

Introduction to the question modules

Religious Affiliation is considered sensitive information and answering a question about it is optional in all Australian Bureau of Statistics collections (see section 14(3) of the Census and Statistics Act 1905).

There are four standard question modules for collecting Religious Affiliation:

- two detailed question modules, comprising:
 - Alternative one: detailed question module for all persons, and
 - Alternative two: detailed question module for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

- two short question modules, comprising:
 - Alternative one: short question module for all persons, and
 - Alternative two: short question module for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

communities.

The choice of module may be informed by the following factors:

- information needs
- cost of processing the data
- space available in the collection instrument, and
- respondent burden.

Each alternative to the question modules may be accompanied by a brief explanatory note about why Religious Affiliation is collected, including instructions about how to answer the question. The explanatory note can be included with the chosen question module or in supplementary documentation. The recommended text for the explanatory note is in Appendix A.

For detailed question modules, respondents should be instructed to select one option only.

The response options listed for the detailed question modules include religious groups according to their statistical frequency in Australia, based on data from the Census of Population and Housing. These option lists may be extended to enable longer lists to be displayed such as in electronic collection drop down lists (see Appendix B). If there are space constraints on paper forms, the option lists can be reduced. The 'No religion' option should always be included.

Detailed question modules

The detailed question modules are recommended where extensive data is required on religious affiliation.

Detailed question module - alternative one

(For all persons)

Q. What is [your] [the person's] [(name)'s] religion?

(Answering this question is OPTIONAL)

For example, Salvation Army, Lutheran, Judaism, Humanism, Acts 2 Alliance, Personal Spiritual Beliefs or Taoism.

If no religion, select the last option.

Uniting Church	<input type="checkbox"/>
Islam	<input type="checkbox"/>
Buddhism	<input type="checkbox"/>
Presbyterian	<input type="checkbox"/>
Hinduism	<input type="checkbox"/>
Greek Orthodox	<input type="checkbox"/>
Baptist	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other - please specify:	_____
No religion	<input type="checkbox"/>

Detailed question module - alternative two

(For use when collecting data from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities)

Q. What is [your] [the person's] [(name)'s] religion?

(Answering this question is OPTIONAL)

For example, Salvation Army, Brethren, Buddhism, Seventh-day Adventist, Personal Spiritual Beliefs, Aboriginal Evangelical Missions or Jehovah's Witnesses.

If no religion, select the last option.

Catholic	<input type="checkbox"/>
Anglican (Church of England)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Uniting Church	<input type="checkbox"/>
Baptist	<input type="checkbox"/>
Lutheran	<input type="checkbox"/>
Presbyterian	<input type="checkbox"/>
Traditional Beliefs	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other - please specify:	_____
No religion	<input type="checkbox"/>

Short question modules

The short question modules are suitable when detailed data on religious affiliation is not required. In comparison to the detailed question modules, these modules will use less space in the collection instrument and may increase respondent burden and coding costs.

Short question module - alternative one

(For all persons)

Q. What is [your] [the person's] [(name)'s] religion?

(Answering this question is OPTIONAL)

For example, Judaism, Humanism, Islam, Greek Orthodox, Baptist, Catholic, Anglican, Acts 2 Alliance, Uniting Church, Personal Spiritual Beliefs or Taoism.

Please enter/write your religion or select the option of no religion.



Short question module - alternative two

(For use when collecting data from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities)

Q. What is [your] [the person's] [(name)'s] religion?

(Answering this question is OPTIONAL)

For example, Traditional Beliefs, Anglican, Catholic, Aboriginal Evangelical Missions, Uniting Church, Lutheran or Baptist.

Please enter/write your religion or select the option of no religion.



Processing the data

Coding

Australian Bureau of Statistics Religious Affiliation variables are coded using the Australian Standard Classification of Religious Groups (ASCRG), 2016 ([ABS catalogue number 1266.0 \(https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats%5Cabs@.nsf/0/08D67CE7C3A715C5CA2570D700130F04?OpenDocument\)](https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats%5Cabs@.nsf/0/08D67CE7C3A715C5CA2570D700130F04?OpenDocument)).

Detailed information about the criteria used to develop the structure of the ASCRG is available in the '[Building the Classification \(https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Latestproducts/1266.0Main%20Features62016?opendocument&tabname=Summary&prodno=1266.0&issue=2016&num=&view="\)](https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Latestproducts/1266.0Main%20Features62016?opendocument&tabname=Summary&prodno=1266.0&issue=2016&num=&view=)' page of the ASCRG.

Where practicable, it is recommended that data be collected, classified and stored at the most detailed level of the classification. This:

- allows greater flexibility for the output of data
- enables more detailed and complex analysis, and
- facilitates comparisons with historical data and data from other sources.

Input categories

The standard categories for collecting Religious Affiliation using the detailed question

modules and short question modules are the 4-digit categories in the ASCRG, including the supplementary codes.

Coding index

Coding indexes are tools that support categorisation of information against a statistical classification and contain terms that are not officially recognised (e.g. synonyms and misspelt terms). A coding index may be of use to anyone seeking to code responses to a statistical classification and may be requested by contacting [\(mailto:standards@abs.gov.au\)](mailto:standards@abs.gov.au).

All responses to questions about Religious Affiliation that are coded to the ASCRG use the coding rules detailed on the '[Index for Coding Responses \(https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Latestproducts/1266.0Main%20Features162016?opendocument&tabname=Summary&prodno=1266.0&issue=2016&num=&view=\)](https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Latestproducts/1266.0Main%20Features162016?opendocument&tabname=Summary&prodno=1266.0&issue=2016&num=&view=)' page of the publication. Responses are matched with entries in an ASCRG coding index to determine the correct classification code.

Presenting the data

Output categories

The hierarchical structure of the Australian Standard Classification of Religious Groups (ASCRG), 2016 ([ABS catalogue number 1266.0 \(https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats%5Cabs@.nsf/0/08D67CE7C3A715C5CA2570D700130F04?Opendocument\)](https://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats%5Cabs@.nsf/0/08D67CE7C3A715C5CA2570D700130F04?Opendocument)) allows users the flexibility to produce statistics at the level of the classification which best suits information needs.

Requirements for data quality or respondent confidentiality may preclude output of data at the more detailed level of the classification. Under these circumstances, data can be aggregated and disseminated at the higher levels of the ASCRG.

Appendix A - explanatory script

[Show all](#)

Appendix B - extended option list

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Abbreviations

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History of changes

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Previous catalogue number

This release previously used catalogue number 1200.0.55.003.

